

Public-sector contract talks

APTS gives back what it got from the Legault government: peanuts

Québec City, October 23, 2020 — Five hundred pounds of peanuts: that's what APTS union members had in store for the Legault government. They shovelled out peanuts in front of the Treasury Board Secretariat's office to show their utter dissatisfaction with the Legault government, which has been paralysing negotiations and ignoring the solutions proposed by the union to reduce workloads by improving measures to attract and retain personnel and providing better working conditions for its 56,000 members.

"For months now, we haven't received any new proposal in writing from the government. For months, the government has been trying to cut back our members' working conditions at a time when they're exhausted and overloaded. For months, the government has been offering peanuts to APTS members and refusing to give them the hazard premiums granted to employees in other job titles. We don't want its peanuts – we want bona fide offers to make our professions attractive and to reduce work overload," declared the president of the APTS, Andrée Poirier.

The condescending comments made the day before by the Treasury Board president, Sonia Lebel, calling on the unions to drop their demands – while the government bargaining team continues to ignore the unions' proposals – have provoked anger at the APTS, which has been trying for months to negotiate with government representatives.

"Ms. Lebel should check what's happening at the bargaining table before making those kinds of statements. A year ago, we submitted close to a hundred proposals to the government to tackle problems like work overload. We have put in a lot of effort to weigh the priorities. So I'd like to ask Ms. Lebel: what sectors does she want to drop? Youth protection? Laboratories? Medical imaging? Mental health? Rehabilitation centres for persons on the autism spectrum or those with intellectual disabilities? CLSCs? She should clearly indicate what has to go. It will be up to her and her government to take the blame for their choices. The APTS, for its part, won't abandon anyone," added the union vice-president, Emmanuel Breton, in front of the mountain of peanuts.

APTS is dismayed at the government's narrow vision of the health and social services system. There's only room for a few professions in the government's imaginary world.

"Who does the lab tests to identify people with COVID-19? Who does the medical imaging tests for patients in intensive care? Who maintains the ventilators that keep them alive? Who ensures patients' nutritional needs? Who is responsible for their rehabilitation after they spend days in bed in a near coma? Who makes sure their medical records are up to date and complete? Who is responsible for reassuring people on the emergency hotlines? Who supports families whose loved one succumbs to the virus? Who helps Quebeckers deal with their anxiety during the crisis? Who is there to help nurses and attendants when things get out of hand in COVID units? Could the Minister of Health and Social Services, Christian Dubé, stop ignoring professional and technical employees and give them the same compensation as workers in other job titles?" demanded Emmanuel Breton.

Work overload and labour shortages are a widespread problem throughout the health and social services system, and Mr. Legault's stubborn refusal to improve working conditions in all the key sectors will only aggravate the situation. The government can't limit itself to stop-gap measures – it has to give the system a real shot in the arm.

"For 20 years now, the government has been eroding the working conditions of health and social services professionals and technicians. For 20 years, it has been telling these public employees that it can't afford to pay them the fair value of their work. Yet it finds the money to underwrite corporate losses and give juicy bonuses to executives of crown corporations. In the middle of a health crisis, can the government stint on measures to improve our members' working conditions and finally tackle overwork, or on mechanisms to attract and retain personnel and ensure our members' health and safety? The answer is self-evident," concluded the APTS vice-president.

The APTS

The [*Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique de la santé et des services sociaux*](#) (APTS) represents 56,000 members who are indispensable in ensuring that public health and social services facilities fulfill their mission. Our members offer an array of services to the Québec population, from diagnostic services to rehabilitation, nutrition, psychosocial intervention, clinical support and prevention services.

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